Lyndsay Shaver

Creative Writing

Personal Essay

I was at a family gathering the other day, the kind of casual get together where everyone that lives close enough comes and you eat too much food and realize just how ridiculous some of the people in your family really are. Except this time it was different. I had people from both sides of the family there together in one room. As I watched them connect with each other, I could see the differences in their ways of being; and began to see just how they contrasted in me.

We all have a family, whether we want to claim them or not is an entirely different story. What I saw that day though, is that regardless of our emotional connection to them, they are a part of us. There are people in my family who think I am insane and if you were to ask them they might say I am careless or unfiltered. Then there are others that think I’m great and enjoy my exuberant, sometimes spastic ways of being. Yet regardless of your family’s opinion of you, or yours of them, I have found a common truth. The truth is that we have inherited more than just our father’s nose or our mother’s eyes; there are pieces of their personalities alive in us as well.

I often hear people say things like “I’m nothing like my (father, mother, brother, you fill in the blank)”, I’ve said it myself countless times. Yet, the more I think about it, the more humorous the retort becomes, because in all truth, I am very much like my father, mother, brothers and grandmothers. It would be impossible for me to pick only one that my personality resembles. Some of these of course are developed habits that you pick up after years of living with someone, but others are traits that you were born with.

My mother grew up with two brothers and five sisters all close in age, so as I grew up with my cousins we had a very young family. My mother’s mother has a calm way of being and a certain way of listening, that I see mirrored in the way my own mother sits and listens to me when I am talking. Neither woman feels the need to get their word in before it is needed, rather they are content to let you speak and respond when you’re done.

Now my dad’s side of the family has a very different way of interaction. Dad grew up with three older brothers and as anyone could tell you, a family of boys is much different than a family of girls. Each family has its own way of functioning and its own personality, my dad’s is slightly crazy. It’s strange because often the things that drive you the craziest about a person are things you do too. My grandmother is in her eighties and has heart issues but cannot sit still for three seconds without worrying about someone or something. It sends my dad and my uncles up the wall with irritation “mother will you just sit down and stop worrying” is a phrase I’ve heard used hundreds if not thousands of times at family gatherings. Yet my father is a classic worry and I am just about as anxious as a person can be without being dubbed a nut case.

A couple years ago when we moved her and Grandpa Shaver into a new house in a safer neighborhood, we had to clean out their house of things they couldn’t take with them in the move. I could see my grandma’s heart ache as we threw out old candles that she couldn’t even light because the smell bugged her and plastic food containers she had saved. She could not part with anything and I understood why, not only was my grandmother a child of the depression, leading her to store years worth of food in her home, but she was also a sentimental woman. I felt for her because if you look in my closet you’ll find shelves of old ticket stubs, snow globes, beanie babies and even soup cans I’ve been hording in case I ever want them again. Each thing holds a memory or a purpose for me even if others do not understand what that may be. I’ve come to appreciate my grandmothers worrying as a sign of just how much love and general concern a person can have, not only for the people that they love and hold dear in their lives, but for a perfect stranger as well. And I understand her need to keep things that may seem unimportant to others because I feel that same need in me.

People who distance themselves from their family, whether it’s because they are embarrassed of them or because they don’t get along, come to find that they can’t escape the things that connect them to these people. Observing my own family, has led me to the conclusion that the things that drive you the craziest about your family, are the traits that you don’t recognize or like in yourself. My father likes to laughs when he talks about his parent’s family from Arkansas, “they’re nicest people you could meet” he would say, “but they’re a bunch of hillbillies and red necks. Though he hardly ever gets to see them and doesn’t consider himself to be like them, I get to laugh too because I frequently come home to find our car parked in the middle of our front yard.

I guess what it comes down to in the end, is that whether we like it or not, our family is our family. We have our parents DNA but when we were born we inherited more than just that. A piece of them is inside of us and we are part of them, so no matter what happens or how far apart one grows from their family, we are still a part of them and they are still a part of us.